Prophet Elias, (Elijah, Iliyas): His Life and Times

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What the Quran says about Prophet Elias, (Elijah, Iliyas)

And Zechariah and John and Jesus and Elias - and all were of the righteous.

(Quran 6:85)

And indeed, Iliyas (Elijah, Elias) was from among the messengers, When he said to his people, "Will you not fear Allah ? Do you call upon Ba'l and leave the best of creators - Allah , your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers?", And they denied him, so indeed, they will be brought [for punishment], Except the chosen servants of Allah, And We left for him [favorable

mention] among later generations: "Peace upon Iliyas (Elijah, Elias)." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants.

(Quran 37:123-132)

What the Jewish Scriptures say about Prophet Elias, (Elijah, Iliyas)

The Drought

Elijah appeared in the Land of Israel at a most crucial time. The Land of Israel was then divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. On the throne of the latter sat king Ahab, but the true ruler of the land was his wife, queen Jezebel, originally a Phoenician princess who never gave up her Phoenician way of life. Her influence was very great not merely over her husband, but throughout the kingdom, and as a result, the worship of the Baal, the god of the Phoenicians, spread with ever greater force, and was the cause of much trouble that befell the land of Israel.

One day the prophet Elijah and king Ahab met. Elijah warned the king of the divine punishment that would

be visited upon his land if he did not abolish idol worship and did not cause a general return of all Israel to God.

Ahab scoffed at the idea, saying: "Didn't Moses already warn us in the Torah that the rain would cease and the land would not give forth its produce, if we should worship other gods? Yet, nothing happened as yet!"

"God has been patient with you, but you don't seem to realize it. Now you will see that not merely shall Moses' words be fulfilled, but mine also. I tell you in God's name that as from today there shall be no rain until I shall say the word!"

From that day years of drought and famine began in the Land of Israel. The famine spread even abroad, beyond the borders of the land, so that no bread could be purchased for its weight in gold!

The Ravens Feed Elijah

Now God told Elijah to withdraw to a deserted place, by the brook of Cherith near the Jordan. "Of the brook you will drink, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you", God promised him. And indeed, twice daily, in the morning and in the evening, the ravens came and brought him bread and meat from the royal table of the King of Judah. Imagine the king's surprise when the ravens swooped down upon his table and

disappeared again with part of his meal! When this became a regular occurrence the king ordered that a special portion of bread and meat be served with his meals, and the ravens never failed to pick it up.

Some time elapsed, and God's word came to Elijah commanding him to go to the land of Sidon, where a noble Jewish woman would provide his food.

When Elijah reached the gates of Zarephath in the land of Sidon, he saw a woman gathering sticks. Elijah called to her, "Please bring me a little water and a morsel of bread".

"All I have," answered the good woman, "is a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a cruse. I was just going to prepare the last meal for my child and myself. Shall I give it to you?"

"Fear not," the Prophet assured her. "Go and bake a little cake for me first, and then you will bake some cake for yourself and your son. For these are the words of God: 'The jar of meal shall not waste, nor shall the cruse of oil fail, until God sends rain and the famine will be over!'"

It was a test that required great faith, but the good woman did not hesitate. She went and did as Elijah bade her, and lo and behold! The handful of meal

never seemed to grow less, nor was the oil diminishing for many days.

Before Elijah left her, he had occasion to repay her for her kindness. It came to pass that her little son fell very sick and was about to die. As all hopes to save his life seemed at an end, Elijah prayed to God and revived him.

Obadiah

In the meantime, Jezebel, the wicked queen, continued to persecute the true prophets, and anyone who dared to speak in the name of God of Israel was immediately put to death at her command. But right in her very palace was a man who, at great risk to his very life, tried to save the remaining true prophets of Israel. His name was Obadiah, who later became a famous prophet. Obadiah hid 100 prophets in 2 secret caves, and sustained them with bread and water. (Water was even scarcer than bread, for there had been no rain for years). Jezebel, however, thought that she had exterminated all the true prophets, and that only Elijah was left. Officers were then sent throughout the land to find Elijah, but they could not find him. However, when the time came for him to make his appearance, he did so quite fearlessly.

It was in the third year of the famine that God told Elijah to appear before king Ahab. The king had already

recognized that the famine was God's punishment, but he was still wavering between right and wrong, and it was Elijah's task to let the king and all the Jews recognize the truth and cause them to return to God with all their hearts

Elijah first appeared before Obadiah and told him to bring the news of his coming to king Ahab, for Elijah was not afraid that Ahab might make plans to apprehend him. Ahab met Elijah with ill grace. "You have caused all this trouble to our people," Ahab said to him.

Elijah threw back the accusation right in the king's face. "Not I but you and your family. You have forsaken God's commandments and have led all the people astray through the worship of the Baal. This must stop now, if Israel is to be saved. Now, therefore, gather all the people on Mount Carmel and all your false prophets and priests of the Baal, and we shall settle the matter once and for all."

At Mount Carmel

Now Jezebel had *850* "prophets" of the Baal who enjoyed her protection and hospitality. These were now gathered by Mount Carmel, together with the great masses of the Jewish people. King Ahab was there, too, to witness the proceedings.

When all were gathered, Elijah addressed the people of Israel: "How long will you waver between two opinions? You worship the idols, but when you are in trouble you turn to God. There can be no two truths. If you recognize God's might, why don't you remain loyal to Him? But if you believe in the Baal, let the Baal help you now!"

Not a voice rose to dispute with Elijah. Elijah then proceeded: "Look! Here I am alone, the only true prophet of God, facing the *850* so-called "prophets" of the Baal. Where the truth is concerned, however, it's not a question to be decided by the majority. God himself will prove it to you! And here is the test. Let two bullocks be brought. Let one be offered by the priests of the Baal to their god, and I shall offer the other to the God of Israel, the creator of the world. We shall set no fire to the wood. They shall pray to the Baal to send a fire and accept the sacrifice, and I will pray to God to send a fire. The one who answers will be recognized as the true God."

All the assembled people voiced their agreement, and two bullocks were brought at once. They were twins and absolutely identical in size and appearance. Lots were cast, and Elijah led away his bullock. As the Baal-prophets tried to lead their bullock away, the bullock didn't budge. The false prophets tried to pull the bullock but could not move him. Then Elijah came up

to the bullock and said to him: "Go with them, and let them have no excuse. For just as your brother will bring a sanctification of God's name, so will you also prove the falsity of the Baal." Only then did the bullock follow the Baal-priests.

The Baal 'prophets' and priests slew their bullock and offered it to the Baal as a sacrifice. They prayed for fire from morning to noon; but, of course, nothing happened. Then Elijah said to them mockingly: "Cry aloud: may be your god is having a busy conversation, or may be he is away on a journey? Perhaps he is asleep? Cry hard, wake him up!" The false prophets cried for all their worth, leaped about their altar, cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets until their blood gushed out upon them. But still nothing happened, and they gave it up, thoroughly exhausted.

The Lord He is God

Then Elijah called to the people to come closer and watch him. He gathered twelve stones, one for each of the twelve tribes, and erected an altar to God. He ordered that a trench be dug around the altar and filled with water. He poured water upon the sacrifice and upon the wood, until it was drenched. Then he uttered a short prayer:

"O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I, Thy servant, have done these things at Thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me!"

No sooner did Elijah conclude his prayer than God sent down a fire from heaven that consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the earth around and the water of the trench!

In great awe all the people fell on their faces and cried out: "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

The people then seized the false prophets and executed them. At once there appeared a little cloud in the sky, the size of a man's hand. It grew very fast and a few minutes later the sky was black with clouds. The long-awaited rain came down in torrents.